

## FORMATION OF PROFESSIONAL READINESS IN TEACHERS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH HEALTH LIMITATIONS

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**Abstract:** The relevance of the problem under study is conditioned by assurance of equal access to education of all students and involving the children having health limitations into the process of inclusive education. One of the main conditions for inclusion is the availability of specially trained teachers skilled in correction and developing technologies of work with such children. The objective of publication consists in presenting the content of work on formation of professional readiness in teachers for inclusive education of children having health limitations. The leading method of research for this problem is generalization of the work experience in studying and forming the teachers' readiness for working with children having health limitations at comprehensive educational organizations, which allows identifying the diversity of preparation forms and further training. The paper describes the components and highlights the particularities of teachers' readiness for teaching and upbringing the children with health limitations at comprehensive educational organizations. It also reflects the work on formation of professional readiness for inclusive education. The materials of the paper may be of use for special psychology and correction pedagogics teachers, as well as for specialists implementing the inclusive education of children with health limitations.

**Keywords:** Professional readiness of teachers, inclusive education, children with health limitations.

### INTRODUCTION

The transformations occurring in the social and economic sphere of the country brought about the changes in the sphere of education. New approaches to education

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of children having health limitations that are oriented to satisfaction of their rights and educational needs have demanded from teachers to be prepared for adopting and implementing the inclusive education.

As a social phenomenon, inclusive education implies the formation of a special culture of attitudes towards persons with health limitations in the society. The methodological basis of inclusion of children having health limitations is the principles of equal rights and opportunities in receiving the education.

A number of foreign studies (Jackson, 2008; Ryndak, 2000; Shemesh, 2009; Voltz, 2001) view the notion “inclusion” as both the society and the comprehensive educational institution admitting the unique nature and value of every child regardless of their distinctions.

In the Federal Law “On education in the Russian Federation” (2012), by inclusive education, they mean the provision of equal access to education for all learners with the diversity of special educational needs and individual possibilities borne in mind.

One of the main problem is generated by the controversy between the implementation and performance of inclusive education and the insufficient readiness of teachers for working in the new conditions. To a significant extent, overcoming of the lack of readiness is associated with formation of the teachers’ professional readiness for working with health limitations children at comprehensive educational institutions. The mass school teachers need aid on the part of specialists for organizing the work with children having different educational needs and possibilities.

Hence this research aimed at solving the problem of teachers being trained for inclusive education seems relevant, timely and expedient.

The novelty of the work consists in describing various author’s forms and methods of interaction with teachers that promote the formation of their professional readiness for inclusive education.

The experimental basis for the research was the Regional state autonomous comprehensive educational institution «Stupeni» education center» (Birobidzhan, Jewish autonomous region). The priority directions of the Center's activity are creation of conditions for children having health limitations to receive education and organization of the integrated psychological and pedagogical support for them.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The scientific and research activity of the department of correction pedagogics, psychology, speech and language therapy is devoted to psychological and pedagogical support of children having health limitations, which is an indispensable condition for performance of inclusive education of this category children. The problem has been considered in the aspects of studying and identifying the psychological particularities

of development of such children (Emelyanova, 2008), of developing and testing out the innovation forms of correctional and developing action (Borisova, 2011), of determining the psychological culture of the future teachers (Shapovalova, 2012) as well as the possibility of modular training of teachers in continuing professional education (Shklyar & Karynbaeva, 2016).

Analyzing various approaches of specialists to definition of the notion “professional readiness”, the authors come to the conclusion that by readiness they should understand a system of integrative qualities, properties, knowledge, and skills of an individual ensuring the efficiency of pedagogical activity.

When solving the task of determining the content of teachers’ professional readiness for inclusive education and directions of work on formation of the latter, the authors analyzed research directions of the Russian specialists. There are the following directions of study: on the essence of inclusion in education (Malofeev, 2009), on readiness of teachers as the major factor of success of the inclusive process in education (Alekhina et al., 2011; Kuzmina, 2011; Chetverikova, 2015), on training, retraining and further training of psychological and pedagogical personnel for inclusive education (Blinova & Karynbaeva, 2014; Dmitriev, 2015), and on the modular system of further training for all specialists (Semago et al., 2011). The foreign experience of inclusive education implementation was generalized too: the teachers’ attitude to the implementation of inclusion of learners having various educational needs at school (Cagran & Schmidt, 2011), the psychological climate in inclusive grades (Schmidt & Cagran, 2006), the ways of support for children having health limitations in conditions of inclusion (Bond & Castagnera, 2006), training of the future bachelors for working in inclusive groups (Scorgie, 2010; Kim, 2011), the role of a teacher’s personality in the process of inclusive education (French & Chopra, 2006; Pijl, 2010), the implementation of various projects on improving the further training programs for teachers having the basic professional education (De Boer et al., 2011), and the exchange of experience of specialists working with children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (Brandon & Charlton, 2011).

The analysis of works of specialists and familiarization with standard regulation documents (The professional standard of teachers, the Uniform concept of the special federal state standard for children having health limitations and the Federal state educational standard of the higher education for training direction 44.03.03 “Special (defectologic) education”) have allowed identifying various components of teachers’ readiness for inclusive education. Some of them are detailed below.

The motivation and value related readiness of teachers consists in adopting the philosophy of inclusive education and support of children having health limitations, in a positive orientation at performing the pedagogical activity under the conditions, in a deep personal interest in the results of one’s work, in understanding and realizing

the social importance of inclusion, as well as in forming the tolerant attitude of the society towards health limitations children.

The cognitive component of readiness points to the general pedagogical and special knowledge available in teachers of comprehensive schools and to their knowing how to use special approaches to education and upbringing of children with health limitations; the capacity for psychological and pedagogical support of the main comprehensive educational programs; learning and relevant use of special technologies and methods that allow conducting the correctional and developing work, and so on.

The operational and practical readiness for inclusive education implies an ability to identify and rationally apply ways and methods of correction of mental and physical development disorders in children having health limitations.

The emotional and volitional readiness manifests itself in an ability to control oneself in certain situations and to adjust one's emotional condition.

The reflexive readiness implies a timely evaluation of what is happening; an ability to see one's possibilities throughout the entire process of psychological and pedagogical support of a child under inclusive education.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The research was conducted on the basis of the Regional state autonomous comprehensive educational institution "Stupeni" education center" (Birobidzhan, JAR) during 2013 – 2016, with 60 teachers working with health limitations children participating in it. In the Center, special educational needs of children who have heavy somatic conditions, hearing, sight, speech, locomotor system disorders, autistic spectrum disorders, and developmental delay are met. The education is organized according to adapted main comprehensive educational programs in various forms: full-time, distance learning, mixed (attending and distance one), which is one of the conditions for organizing the inclusive educational environment. The teaching team is oriented to the questions of inclusive education.

The first stage of the research was conducted during 2013 – 2014 academic years using the original technique developed at the department of correction pedagogics, psychology, speech and language therapy and including a series of questionnaire forms.

The objective of the technique was to study readiness of teachers for inclusive education of children having health limitations.

Each series included 15 questions.

Only some of them are cited below. The first series of questions was aimed at studying the motivational and personal component of the readiness. The teachers had to choose one of the suggested answer options ("always", "sometimes", "never"):

Do you realize social importance of working with children who have health limitations in conditions of inclusive education?

Do you show empathy towards children having health limitations?

Do you feel a need of professional and pedagogical improvement?

Do you show readiness to participate in innovation processes?

Do you show pedagogical optimism in working with health limitations children? and so on.

The second series of questions allowed determining the levels of formation of the cognitive component of teachers' readiness for inclusive education. The teachers had to choose one of the suggested answer options ("to the full extent", "partially", "not at all").

Do you know any specific principles of teaching the children with health limitations?

Do you know any methods of upbringing the health limitations children?

Do you know any methods and techniques of correctional education for children having various kinds of deviating development?

Do you know any special subject teaching techniques?

Do you know etiopathogenic factors influencing the children's development? and so on.

The third series of questions helped identify the teachers' knowledge in social and legal component of the readiness. They had to choose one of the suggested answer options ("to the full extent", "partially", "not at all").

Do you know the modern ideas about social phenomena and processes?

Do you know about the problems of socialization of graduates having health limitations?

Do you know the foundations of legal system and legislation in the area of inclusive education?

Do you know the problems of individual and society interaction? and so on.

After the processing of the results obtained, the levels of teachers' readiness for inclusive education were determined: the critical, permissible, sufficient, and the optimum one.

The second stage (2014 – 2016) of the research was aimed at organizing and performance of work on formation of the teachers' readiness for inclusive education of children having health limitations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The permissible level of learning the motivational and personal readiness for inclusive education was shown by 33 teachers (55%). Among them, rather weak

motivation of accepting the children with health limitations in conditions of a comprehensive educational organization. In this group teachers, the wish to form a tolerant attitude of the society to children having health limitations is not pronounced enough. This is due to their sketchy knowledge in questions of determining the ways for forming a positive attitude. Due to this, they pointed to the necessity and importance of continuous professional and pedagogical improvement, as the efficiency of these children's inclusive education cannot be achieved without special training. The critical level was demonstrated by 15 teachers (25%). This speaks about their being not always capable of accepting and rendering the aid to health limitations children and their understanding the social importance of working with the children of this category in comprehensive school conditions not profoundly enough. They are not aimed at conducting work on forming the tolerant attitude of the society to such children and they do not express any active interest in continuous professional and pedagogical improvement. As for the optimum and sufficient levels readiness, these were registered in 2 (3%) and 10 people (17%), respectively.

The analysis of data on determining the formation level of cognitive readiness allows stating that 31 teachers (52%) have shown a permissible level. They only have fragmented professional knowledge, abilities and skills that are essential for organizing the educational process in conditions of inclusive education. The critical level of readiness has been marked in 21 teachers (35%). They lack orientation in principles of correction education, in special subject teaching techniques, in the knowledge of etiopathogenic factors influencing the children's development, in foundations of psychodiagnostics and in knowledge of study methods. The optimum level has been featured by 2 respondents (3%), while the sufficient one – by 6 teachers (10%).

The study of social and legal readiness of the teachers for inclusive education has shown certain gaps in their knowledge of the legal system and legislation as well as in questions of the society and individual interaction. The permissible level has been found in 36 teachers (60%), the critical one – in 10 respondents (17%). The optimum level has been registered in 6 people (11%) and the sufficient one – in 8 people (13%).

The results of the first stage of the research have demonstrated a various extent of the teachers' readiness and have pointed to the necessity of working on its formation while also becoming a basis for determining the ways, forms, content, methods and means of working with them at the following stage.

The second stage was targeted at the formation of readiness for inclusive education in the teachers.

For this purpose, a group consisting of 60 teachers of the Regional state autonomous comprehensive educational institution "Stupeni" education center" was formed by the authors, the people participating in various organizational forms of work.

In working with the teaching staff, both the conventional (lectures, seminars, consulting meetings, round tables, analysis of special literature etc.) and active forms of work (solving the problem situations, discussion workshops, debate workshops, business games etc.) were used.

The criterion for conducting group consulting meetings was the shared interests and main difficulties within the aspect of the problem studied. The group consulting meetings were aimed at formation in the teachers of a system of ideas and knowledge about innovations in the education system as well as solution of problems in organization and performance of inclusive education of schoolchildren. For instance, the consulting meeting on “Ethic and methodological aspects of inclusive education” promoted comprehending the essence of inclusion processes, changing the teachers’ attitude to the implementation of the latter, determining the principles of performance and conditions for conducting the co-education, and so on.

The individual tutorials were aimed at resolving more specific nature problems. The list of questions the teachers would like to get the answers to had previously been determined. Given the requests from the teachers, the lead specialists in the appropriate profiles (a defectologist teacher, a psychologist teacher, a methodologist, a speech and language therapy teacher, etc.) were invited by the authors. The teachers were interested in solving the problems of various subject topics teaching technique, taking into account of individual particularities of mental development of children with health limitations in the process of education and upbringing, correcting the disorders of the children’s emotional and volitional sphere, forming the interpersonal relationships among the schoolchildren etc. For example, the tutorial “Methods of increasing the teaching process efficiency with learners having health limitations at the comprehensive school” contained recommendations on intensifying the education process which consisted in the use of technical education means and improvement of the conventional techniques accelerating and facilitating the knowledge acquisition process, in the selection and use of various correctional teaching means, in gradual and staged study of the material, as well as in taking into account the individual and typological particularities of the mental development in students of the same class etc. During the tutorial, the teachers while analyzing their activity identified what they were already using and what they were going to implement into the educational process. The tutorial “Individual and differentiated approach to health limitations learners at the lessons” contained practical recommendations on creating conditions for an active, organized work of all learners in the education process and on the use of individual and differentiated approaches to each of them. It was emphasized that this work requires carefully studying the learners of the class. It has to be conducted on the basis of analysis of medical, psychological and pedagogical documentation as well as by means of other diagnosing methods (interview, observation, analysis of written works etc.).

Conducting the round tables on the questions of modeling the inclusive educational environment and using the methods of correctional work promoted the identification of the teachers' standpoints as for the implementation of co-education ideas as well as determination of the educational process efficiency ways and means. For instance, discussion of the topic "The role of a teacher in performance of inclusive education and upbringing of children having various educational needs" was aimed at forming a positive attitude in the teachers towards the implementation of inclusive education. Although the teachers voiced various viewpoints on solving the problem of co-education of children with health limitations at comprehensive educational organizations, they have come to the shared opinion about the result efficiency of work to be depending on the system of their cooperation with students and parents as well as on the profound knowledge of the children's psychological particularities. In its turn, this requires retraining and continuous self-education.

The teachers were active in the work of regional scientific and practical seminars, the topics range varying: "The relevant problems and prospects of development of special education in Jewish autonomous region", "Inclusive education as a phenomenon within the system of education of children having health limitations", "Personal and professional readiness of teachers for inclusive education and upbringing of children with health limitations", "Psychological and pedagogical support for health limitations children at comprehensive educational institutions", "Ways for enhancing the professional competence of specialists in conditions of support of children having health limitations at comprehensive educational institutions in the process of inclusive education", "The culture of psychological and pedagogical support of children with health limitations in conditions of today's education", etc.

Conducting of scientific and practical seminars promoted the exchange of opinions within the context of solving the relevant problems of co-education and upbringing and the questions of modeling the inclusive educational environment at the comprehensive schools of Jewish autonomous region. The greater part of the scientific and practical seminars was conducted jointly with specialists who work with children having health limitations at special (correctional) educational organizations of Birobidzhan and Khabarovsk. The authors believe this work organization form to be one of the optimum ones, because it is at these institutions that the main staff capacity of specialists working with children of this category is focused.

Alongside with that, discussion workshops and debate workshops were conducted on a routine basis. Being active methods, they promoted free exchange of opinions on ways of solving this or that problem, detailing the interrelation between theory and practice as well as viewing the questions being discussed from the standpoints of the contemporary science.



A special attention in the teachers' training during seminars was paid to business games. It is this education organization form that promoted recreation of actual situations where certain fragments of the reality were portrayed. Acting their game part (a teacher, a parent, a child) and entering conventionally real relationships with other players, the teachers gained an experience of cognitive and professional activity as well as skills of social relationships.

One of the performances of a teacher's professional competence is the teacher's capacity for self-education, so this form has been paid a special attention by the authors. When planning the work, difficulties and educational requests of the teachers were taken into account. Such work forms as analysis of special psychological and pedagogical literature with the follow-on preparation of reports and presenting them at practical classes, compiling bibliographies on the questions of interest, visiting the lessons of lead specialists and generalization of their advanced experience, as well as analyzing one's own lessons were provided for.

For ensuring the scientific and methodological support of the development of their professional competence, the teachers took part in scientific and practical conferences: "Psychological and pedagogical support of the development of children at educational institutions", "Contemporary technologies of psychological and pedagogical support of children's development in mass and special (correctional) schools and preschool institutions", "Creation of optimum conditions for the psychological and pedagogical support of the development of children at educational institutions", "Inclusive education: problems, search, solutions", "The culture of psychological and pedagogical support of children as a norm of professional activity of teachers", and others.

Such work promoted the development of research competence in the teachers, generalization of their experience and self-analysis of their own activity.

The teachers were educated on the basis of the Federal state budget-funded educational institution of the higher education "Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University" in the retraining program "The culture of psychological and pedagogical support of children having health limitations in conditions of the contemporary education". The program comprised four modules: "The psychological aspects of support of the development of children having health limitations", "The pedagogical aspects of support of health limitations children in the educational space", "Methodological aspects of organization of the study process", and "The contemporary correctional technologies of support of children having health limitations".

The program was conducted by the academic teaching staff of the department of correction pedagogics, psychology and speech and language therapy.

Open classes and lessons were conducted for the course participants by the lead teachers on the basis of Special (correctional) institution of type VIII No. 12

of Birobidzhan, the compensation kindergarten No. 21 of Birobidzhan, the Special (correctional) comprehensive boarding school of type II of Khabarovsk, with the subsequent close analysis under the guidance of the teachers. During the analysis, the essential characteristics of teaching the children with health limitations were identified, as well as specific techniques and methods of working with them, particularities of interaction of specialists in psychological and pedagogical support of this category of children in conditions of comprehensive schools, etc.

According to the results of the program completion, standard diplomas of professional retraining have been issued for the teachers having participated.

Alongside with that, the teachers were educated in the further training program "Psychological and pedagogical support of children with health limitations" which included the following modules: "Today's priorities in the development of the system of psychological and pedagogical support for children at comprehensive educational institutions", "Psychological and pedagogical foundations of optimization of teacher's activity", "Subjects teaching theory and practice".

According to the results of the program being mastered, standard certificates of further training have been issued for the teachers having participated.

## CONCLUSION

A special place in the structure of teachers training is allotted for the formation of their professional readiness for inclusive education. In this direction, planning and performance of work directly depends on the interests and requests on the part of specialists engaged in the process of organizing the co-education. The outlined organizational forms of work and methods of learning for teachers promote the formation of their readiness for working with children having health limitations at comprehensive educational organizations.

Having completed the education programs, the authors organized observations in order to determine the opportunity of teachers' using the received knowledge in their practical activity. According to the observations, these teachers' lessons began to differ from ones conducted at the initial stage of the research. The differences included a clearer correctional and practical orientation of education and upbringing, using various tasks, and observing the protective pedagogical regimen (PT-breaks, the conformity of study load to the age and mental and physical particularities of the children's development, observance of sanitary and hygienic requirements etc.).

On balance, the observations have shown that teachers have started to actively implement the learnt techniques of working with children having health limitations and to use theoretical knowledge in practice. They have also voiced suggestions for further cooperation with scientists and leading specialists.

Thus, the research conducted has confirmed a high relevance of the problem stated and the necessity of a further more profound elaboration of questions

pertaining to the formation of teachers' professional readiness for providing inclusive education to children having health limitations.

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